

[Portland in the Gay '90s]

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 24, 1939

Address 505 Elks Bldg., Portland, Oregon

Subject Portland in the Gay '90s — Sporting House Guide.

Name and address of informant Wm. (Billy) Mayer

220 Third Avenue, Portland, Oregon

Date and time of interview March 23, 1939 a.m.

Place of interview Cigar stand in lobby Davis Building, 220 3rd Ave. Portland

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Unknown person, presumably a salesman, volunteered the name upon hearing the interviewer

asking whereabouts of another "prospect."

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Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Small cigar stand, in lobby of Davis building, one of Portland's early

day business and office buildings, shabby and out-of-date. The interview was interrupted frequently by purchasers of cigars rather than of cigarettes.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

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Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth

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3. Family

4. Place lived in, with dates

5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special [skills?] and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of [?]

10. Other points gained in interview

9. Dark complexioned, medium sized and dapper type of man, who wears his clothes with an air, and was probably something of a man-about-town in his day.

10. The interviewer gathered that the informant could tell some talltales and otherwise pertaining to the history of Portland, and particularly of certain phases of Portland life of a former day. But when he clamped his mouth down, and said "Nah, "she decided to "soft pedal" and take what she could get.

Other vital statistics unobtainable.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

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Name and address of informant Wm. (Billy) Mayer

220 Third Ave., Portland, Oregon

Text: Nah, I don't think I've anything worth telling. Nah, nah, I don't want to be bothered. Here's a little old book. Nah, I won't let you see it — I wouldn't let my own mother see it. It's a guide to the old bawdy houses in Portland, back in '94. Here, I'll read you some of it, if you must have it.

There was a back on it originally that advertised the old White House, out on the Willamette river, where the fine homes of Riverdale are now. There was a little race track out there — quarter mile track I think it was — and all the bloods with fast horses used to drive out there on what was called the Macadam Road. It was the only road of the kind then in the country. That's how the street leading out that way got its name. They served meals and I guess just about anything you wanted at that old White House. It had verandahs out over the river, and later, when launches came along, the gay folks went up the river that way.

Here's an advertisement of the old restaurants in town, and there's advertisements of the theaters and the saloons and pool-rooms too. Those old restaurants, with their private booths and dining rooms, could tell some tall tales. There was the Louvre, and up on West Park there was the Richards Restaurant. That was a big place, with side entrances, where

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they served fine 2 food and wines and liquors of every sort. There was a big dining room, of course, but its likely most of the paying business was in the private, small dining rooms leading off from the narrow corridors. Mayor Harry Lane, afterwards U. S, Senator, was responsible for closing up the Richards place. He had it raided and closed. Seems some of his women relatives, or one of them at least, frequented it. There was quite a scandal at the time. Nah, I don't remember the details. Anyway, Lane closed Richards, and shortly after all the other places with booths was closed up.

Here, these verses — Sam Simpson, the old poet of Oregon, is said to have written them; I don't know. — But they advertised the “madams.” Yes, they were all called “madam” then. I don't know why they all have “Miss” in front of their names here. Ah, here, you might as well take the book and copy the stuff, I haven't got time to read it all....

Oh, I don't mind telling you one little old fool story about myself.

Don't amount much to nothing. Just shows what a fool a fellow makes of himself getting drunk: in the early 1900's I was making pretty good money and I spent it, mostly on booze. Finally I decided to cut the likker out. I sobered up and saved my money and put it in the bank. There was a bank — I don't remember its name — up on Sixth and Washington streets. I put my money in that. Kinda funny, we always associate snakes with drinking, and there was a snake that run up and down the sign on that bank; anyway it looked like a snake. Electricity running 'round letters was just being introduced. Well I put my money there till I got \$200.00. I was feeling pretty good. Then one morning I went up to the bank to deposit \$20.00, and it was closed. All my money gone to hell. The lid was off from that minnit. I got good an' drunk an' before night I was dead-broke, the \$20.00 gone an' all the loose change I had besides. I had a big gold watch that I'd carried a long time. All my friends knew it. It had a lighthouse engraved 3 on the face of the lid. I was still pretty drunk, but I wanted to raise same dough, so I wandered up Third street to a saloon where there was a friend of mine. I thought he'd lend as \$10 on the watch. His saloon had a ladies entrance, just like they all had them days. I went in the ladies entrance, an' I was showin'

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this friend the watch an' while we was talking about it, a girl came out one of the rooms. She saw the watch and said, "Let me see it." Not having my wits about me I handed it over and just like a flash she was gone through the door. I dashed after her, but she'd gone through one door and I'd gone through another. She wasn't any place to be found, and she took my watch with her. I sure was broke then. Well, the funny part of the whole story is that a good while afterwards I was in a saloon — I think it was on Washington between Fourth and Fifth — when in comes a fellow from the street. He had a watch, and he wanted to know what the saloonkeeper would give for it. The saloonkeeper was an old friend of mine, and right away he grabbed the watch. It had a lighthouse on the cover and it proved to be my watch. I paid \$40 for it and got it back.

But before I got through with treats an' everything that damned watch cost me about a million. Funny thing, that in a town of 200,000 where there was 419 saloons at that time, that fellow should come in the saloon where I was to peddle my watch.

They talk a lot about stopping the gambling about town these days, but you don't see 'em doing much. It took a man like Tom [?], who was county sheriff in 1905, to close the gambling joints. One of the biggest and most popular places was the Warwick. I recall Tom went down there with a hatchet and broke down the door himself. Then he pinched the place and put a padlock on the door, and he kept a deputy sheriff outside that door for a solid year to see that it wasn't opened up again. Now they stop a place and then don't pay any further attention to it.

Form D

Extra Comment

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Comment: The interviewer, upon learning of the informant, called upon him immediately. He promised an interview and some stories of early-day Portland; (material which he claimed to have given a well-known writer. When the interviewer arrived, however, promptly on the minute the next morning he had changed his mind. He gave only the small amount of material included herewith.)

Attached are the verses from the Sporting Guide, which the interviewer copied.

1

Taken from original in possession of Wm. (Billy) Mayer

220 Third Ave., Portland

A small printed guidebook in pamphlet form. Printer's name not shown.

Submitted by Sara Wrenn

September, 1894

THE GUIDE

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A description of amusement resorts of Portland, Oregon and vicinity.

Also a complete sporting record.

2

PREFACE This in a guide without avarice tainted A “tip”, as it were, before you're acquainted. And now, my good friends, you've had my excuse; I could have said more, but what is the use? This thing I've “writ” and it is dedicated To strangers and those who're uninitiated. 3 A FAST LOCALITY

In Portland is a notorious locality, known by the suggestive name of the “White-Chapel District.” It is the home of the most abandoned members of the demimonde, and on a small scale resembles the famous section of London, after which it is named. Within its boundaries are several hundred women, most of whom live in small one-story houses or cribs. The inmates of these cribs represent every nationality, with the French predominating.

On Lower Second street can be seen Japanese and African women.

This district lies north of Ankeny street, and, owing to the surveillance of Portland's admirable police department, is perfectly safe for the stranger to visit, provided he does not get too familiar with the occupants of the “cribs.”

4

MISS MINNIE REYNOLDS

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89 - Fifth Street In handsome parlors, skilled to please, Fair Minnie waits in silken ease,
And at each guest's desire supplies Dear pleasures, hid from prying eyes. With such a
haven ever nigh, Who could pass her parlors by?

MISS FANSHAW

151 Seventh Street Let's live while we live; We'll be dead a long while, And tho Fortune
may frown, Fair Miss Fanshaw will smile. If a kiss will not soothe you, She has pleasures
that will; The chalice of passion overflowingly fill, And your troubles and cares You will
lightly ignore When love's rich libation This charmer will pour.

5

MISS MABEL MONTAGUE

94 Fifth Street, Cor. Stark Here is a mansion, of which it is related That on all of this Coast
it is not duplicated. It's well-furnished parlors the fashionable seek, For comfort is here,
joined to the unique, And the girls who respond to the visitors' call, Are the pride of Miss
Mabel, and the pride of her hall.

MISS DELLA BURIS

150 East Park, between Alder and Morrison Here is a lady of such ways all admire. She no
flattery from the best does require. Modest as a maiden youthful, Good-natured as she in
truthful, Della Burris has a name All might enjoy, none can blame.

MISS DORA CLARK

MISS MAUD MORRISON

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95 Sixth Street, Cor. Stark No man in this City who is known as a sport But will tell you
he's seen and enjoyed this resort. It's a house full of beauties, whose rooms dazzling
bright, Shimmer and glimmer with mirth and delight.

MISS IDA AURLINGTON

No. 90 Fifth Street To reign is beauty's queenly right, And he is but a shabby knight, Who
is not charmed, aye, wholly won By lovely Ida Aurlington, Whose grace of manner and of
form Takes every manly heart by storm.

6

MADAM FLORA

130 Fifth Street The gay rose gardens now are [?], But blooming Flora still is here To
make us quite forget the rose Has signed her gentle adios.

DORA LYNN If you're out for a lark, or that is your passion, Just call at this house, so lately
in fashion. With its fairylike nymphs and Dora Lynn its queen, Where privacy, rest, and all is
serene. There are a great many Doras, but I write this one down As the best one that ever
has lived in this town.